



Chemetco buildings slated for removal

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HARTFORD - The big, unsightly buildings at the former Chemetco plant adjacent to Illinois Route 3 near Hartford are on the way out and may be gone by the end of the year, officials said.

"We are thrilled that this is finally moving forward," said Deanna Barnes, the administrative supervisor of the village of Hartford.

"Complete demolition is scheduled for the end of the year," said Maggie Carson, a spokeswoman for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

She said the IEPA has entered a contract with American Integrated Systems to do the demolition work.

The IEPA took over and sealed the site in 2001 after the business failed and filed for bankruptcy.

Carson said her agency is overseeing the building demolition, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is overseeing removal of the big heaps of slag on the site.

The failed copper smelter has been named a U.S. EPA Superfund Site, said Michelle Kerr, a spokeswoman for the U.S. EPA's Region 5. The timing of the slag removal has not been set, she said.

"We are on the site, and we are working," Kerr said.

A firm is conducting a pilot study to determine whether metals from the slag heaps can be recycled, she said. Bankruptcy trustee Donald Sampson, a Belleville lawyer, has asked the federal bankruptcy court to approve a list of price bids on the different metals at the site. Sampson did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

Both agencies are working with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court to clean up the site and recover any funds that may be available from recycling the materials.

Carson said a decontamination plan for the buildings and the immediate area around the buildings was approved in May. Any potentially hazardous material has to be made safe before the work can be done.

She said two large kilns in the former smelting plant will be removed and likely sold. The metals recovered in the demolition of the buildings will be recycled, and proceeds will go to the bankruptcy estate to settle at least some of the debt.

Carson said at least one building on the site will remain for storage.

Tom Hawkins, a supervisor in the Madison County Planning and Development Department, said the county has issued demolition permits for four of the buildings after obtaining approval from the IEPA.

"They are right across from a state park (Lewis and Clark State Memorial Park) and they need to go," Hawkins said.

The Superfund designation is known formally as the National Priorities List. It allows federal dollars to be

used in the cleanup. Under the Superfund program, the U.S. EPA investigates and cleans up the most complex and uncontrolled hazardous waste sites in the country.

The plant operated between 1969 and 2001 before filing for protection under the federal bankruptcy laws.

More than 500,000 cubic yards of slag, sludge and other hazardous materials were left on portions of the 41-acre site.

Elevated levels of heavy metals, copper, cadmium, lead and zinc have been found in adjacent wetlands and in the sediment of the nearby Long Lake.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry said in 1999 that, in addition to water pollution, one of the health hazards of the site is inhalation of airborne particles of heavy metals, but officials have taken steps to subdue the dust.

The firm once was one of the largest refiners of copper in the country, but the smelter closed down after law enforcement officials indicted the company and five of its officers for violating federal law.

A secret pipe carried polluted process water into Long Lake, which fed into the Mississippi River. When the pipe was discovered in 1996, the IEPA estimated the pollution had been going on for 10 years.

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